

## RISK FACTOR INDEXES

A series of indices were constructed to provide an overview of risk behavior activities. Indices were created to measure the overall number of risk factors in the following areas: vehicle safety, weapons use, violence, suicide, tobacco use, alcohol use, drug use, sexual activity, exercise, dieting, and nutrition.

Indices were constructed as a simple count of the number of risky behaviors students engaged in within a given set of possible behaviors. Indices ranged from as few as two possible behaviors (for weapons use) to as many as 11 (for drug use).

### *Vehicle Safety*

The vehicle safety index aggregates four behaviors: seatbelt nonuse, motorcycle helmet nonuse, riding with a driver who has been drinking, or driving after drinking. Behaviors were considered risky if: 1) they reported wearing seatbelts less than “always” or “most of the time,” 2) they reported riding a motorcycle in the past 12 months and wearing motorcycle helmets less than “always” or “most of the time” 3) they reported riding with a driver who had been drinking at least once in the past 30 days, and 4) they reported driving a vehicle after they had been drinking at least once in the past 30 days.

The vehicle safety index ranged from zero to four points. Students averaged 1.1 risk factors in this area. Thirty-seven percent of students were free of vehicle safety risk factors. Thirty percent reported one risk factor. Eighteen percent had two risk factors, 15 percent reported three or four risk factors. Male students reported more risk factors than female students. As grade level increased students reported slightly more risk factors.

### *Weapons Carrying*

The weapons use index aggregates two behaviors: carrying any weapon in the past 30 days, and carrying a gun in the past 30 days. Behaviors were considered risky if they reported either of these behaviors at all in the past 30 days.

The weapons carrying index ranged from zero to two. Students averaged 0.3 risk factors in this area. The vast majority of students (81 percent) reported no risk factors in this category. Female students were less likely to report any risk factors in this category than male students. Students reported slightly fewer risk factors as grade increased, but the differences were not significant.

### *Violence*

The violence index aggregates eight behaviors including: being threatened or hurt with a weapon, being involved in a physical fight in the past 12 months, receiving an injury in a fight within the past 12 months that required medical attention, having been threatened or hurt because someone thought you were gay, lesbian, or bisexual, having been threatened or hurt because of your race, having ever been sexually harassed, feeling safe from physical harm at school and feeling safe from physical harm on the way to or from school. Students were considered at risk if they reported any of these occurrences within the given time period or if they reported “usually not feeling safe” at school or on the way to or from school.

The violence index ranged from zero to eight. Students averaged 0.9 risk factors in this area. Forty-four percent of students reported no risk factors here. Thirty-four percent reported one risk factor. Thirteen percent reported two risk factors, five percent reported three risk factors and an additional four percent reported four or more risk factors. There was no significant difference between male and female students. There was a statistically significant trend for the number of reported risk factors to decrease with grade level.

### *Suicide*

The suicide index aggregates three behaviors including: having seriously thought about committing suicide in the past 12 months, having attempted suicide in the past 12 months, and having received injuries that required medical attention as the result of a suicide attempt in the past 12 months.

The suicide index ranged from zero to three. Students averaged 0.4 risk factors in this area. Over two-thirds of students reported no risk factors in this area, nearly one-quarter reported one risk factor, and 8 percent reported two or more. Female students were significantly more likely to report more risk factors than male students. There was no significant difference by grade level.

### *Tobacco Use*

The tobacco use index aggregates five behaviors including: having ever smoked a whole cigarette, frequency of smoking, number of cigarettes smoked per day<sup>1</sup>, having smoked cigars, cigarillos or little cigars, and having used any chewing tobacco in the past 12 months. Students who had smoked at all in the past 30 days received a single risk factor for this behavior while students who smoked on each of the past 30 days received two risk factors on the index. Students who smoked a half pack of cigarettes or more on the days when they smoked were considered at risk for this behavior.

The tobacco index ranged from zero to six. Students averaged 1.5 risk factors in this area. One-third of all students reported no risk factors in tobacco use. Nearly a quarter of students reported one risk factor, nearly a third reported two or three, and slightly more than a tenth reported four or more. Male students reported more risk factors than female students, and risk factors increased significantly with grade level.

### *Alcohol Use*

The alcohol use index aggregated three behaviors including: having ever had an alcoholic beverage, having had an alcoholic beverage in the past 30 days, and having had five or more drinks at one occasion at least once in the past 30 days.

The alcohol index ranged from zero to three. Students averaged 1.7 risk factors in this area. Nearly a quarter of students reported no risk factors in alcohol use, slightly more reported one risk factor, less than one-fifth reported two and slightly more than a third reported three risk factors. Male students reported slightly more risk factors on average than female students. Similarly, the average number of reported risk factors increased from 1.4 in ninth grade to 1.9 in twelfth grade.

### *Drug Use*

The drug use index aggregated 11 behaviors. This included having ever used marijuana, having used marijuana more than once or twice in one's lifetime, having used marijuana in the past 30 days, having ever used any form of cocaine, having used any form of cocaine more than once or twice, having used any form of cocaine in the past 30 days, having ever used inhalants, having ever used heroin, having ever used methamphetamines, having ever used LSD in one's lifetime, and having ever injected an illegal drug.

The drug use index ranged from zero to 11. Students averaged 1.7 risk factors in this area. Over half of all students reported no risk factors. One fifth reported one or two risk factors. One sixth reported three or four risk factors. One tenth reported five or more. Male students reported more risk factors on average than female students. The number of reported risk factors increased with grade level, from 1.4 in ninth grade to 2.0 in twelfth grade.

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<sup>1</sup> On those days when the student smoked.

### *Sexual Activity*

The sexual activity index aggregated seven behaviors including: having ever had sexual intercourse, having had sexual intercourse for the first time under the age of 14, having had three or more sexual partners in one's lifetime, having had two or more sexual partners in the past three months, having used drugs or alcohol before one's most recent sexual experience, having not used a condom during one's most recent sexual experience, and having not used a reliable form of birth control during one's most recent sexual experience.

The sexual activity index ranged from zero to seven. Students averaged 1.4 risk factors in this area. Over half of all students reported no risk factors in this area, 19 percent reported one or two risk factors, 22 percent reported three or four, and four percent reported five or more risk factors. Male students reported slightly more risk factors on average than female students, though the difference was only marginally significant. The number of reported risk factors increased with grade level, from 1.2 in ninth grade to 1.7 in twelfth grade.

### *Exercise*

The exercise index aggregated four behaviors including: having exercised hard fewer than three days in the past week, having had physical education classes on fewer than three days per average school week, having exercised for 20 minutes or less during the average PE class, and having been on no team sports in the past year.

The exercise index ranged from zero to four, with approximately one-third reporting no risk factors, one-quarter reporting one, and one-fifth reporting two risk factors. Sixteen percent reported three risk factors and five percent reported four. Students averaged 1.3 risk factors in this area. Female students reported slightly more risk factors on average than male students. There was a statistically significant trend for the number of reported risk factors to increase with grade level, though this trend was not demonstrated in a linear increase in average risk factors by grade level.

### *Nutrition*

The nutrition index included measures of the number of times students reported eating each of three classes of food on the previous day including: fruits and fruit juice, vegetables and vegetable juice; and milk, yogurt or cheese. Students were considered at risk if they had fewer than two servings of fruit or fewer than three of vegetables or dairy products. Care should be taken in interpreting this index because of possible biases and inaccuracies introduced in the question wording.

The nutrition index ranged from zero to three. Students averaged 2.1 risk factors in this area. Only three percent of students reported no nutrition risk factors, 18 percent reported only one factor, 39 percent reported two, and 40 percent reported all three risk factors. Female students reported slightly more risk factors on average than male students. The number of reported risk factors increased slightly with grade level, from 2.1 in ninth grade to 2.2 in twelfth grade.

### *Dieting*

The dieting index aggregated three behaviors including body image, unhealthy weight loss behaviors such as using laxatives, vomiting or diet pills to lose weight in the past 30 days, and being overweight according to the student's BMI. Students received one risk factor on the index if they reported their weight as either "very" over- or under weight.

The dieting index ranged from zero to three. Over three-quarters of all students reported no dieting risk factors, one-fifth reported one risk factor, and four percent reported two or three. Students averaged 0.3 risk factors in this area. Male students reported fewer dieting risk factors than female students. There were no significant differences among the grade levels.

### *Total Risk Factors*

All individual risk factor area indices were added together to form a total risk factor index. The total risk factor index ranged from zero to 47. Students averaged 12.7 risk factors overall. Forty-seven percent of students reported ten or fewer risk factors. Thirty-seven percent of all students reported 11 to 20 risk factors. Thirteen percent reported 21 to 30 risk factors. Three percent reported more than 30 risk factors. Male students reported more risk factors than female students and reported risk factors generally increased with grade level, from 11.7 in ninth grade to 14.5 in twelfth grade.